

Minimising Single Use Cup Waste

Single use cups are a major waste stream from universities and colleges. Most cannot be recycled, but there is a lot of confusion around this and disposable cups present a major waste contamination issue. Behaviour change will be a key factor in reducing both contamination and the use of disposable cups, and starting to limit damage to our environment by switching to either reusable or recyclable / compostable cup solutions.

Option 1: Promoting Reusable Cups

- 100% use of reusable cups should be the main priority, however this is hard to achieve due to the behaviour change required in all users
- Re-useable Cups could be introduced over Recycle Week, Freshers Week or a related event to boost reach of campaigns, and include organisational branding
- Washing facilities can encourage use of reusable cups, and remind students about their keep cups. This also helps tackle waste contamination if there is a liquid waste facility within the washing area.



Selecting a Reusable Cup to Promote

- The footprint of reusable cups themselves is an issue. Buy cups produced locally to reduce transport costs and cups that also are recyclable/degradable. Ecoffee cups are made from bamboo and corn starch so can be put into garden waste, whereas the popular KeepCup brand are plastic, requiring oil to produce them and having a long term impact
- It is vital that catering staff agree to the type of cup, and that they work well with the coffee machines
- Partnering with catering organisations and having dual branding of cups can allow sharing of costs on the initial purchase, and having catering teams on board can help promote use of reusable cups at the time when purchase decisions are made

Incentivising Use of Reusable Cups

- As an incentive to buy a reusable cup free drinks are often offered
- Whilst incentives to buy work initially then it is important to keep people carrying and using the cup
- Discounts, such as 20p off each drink in a reusable cup, are popular
- Alternatively introducing a cost, like a disposable cup tax, could be used. This might have similar success to the plastic bag tax (85% reduction) but no long term case studies of this are known
- Catering till systems can measure how many re-useable cups have been used, helping monitor effectiveness of incentives and promotions on the use of different cup choices

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Option 2: Switching to biodegradable/recyclable cups

- Biodegradable cups should be considered secondary to reusable cups, due to them still contributing to an unnecessary waste stream and the energy involved in producing/delivering/composting them
- There is only value in biodegradable cups if the waste is properly handled. To decompose as intended they must go to anaerobic digesters. For those with the right waste mix, investing in an on-site Anaerobic Digester/ Composter can be a good way to deal with this, as all food waste can be sent here and the compost used on site
- Vegware is a popular brand, but there are cheaper alternative options, such as [these](#).
- When biodegradable or recyclable single use cups are used this can increase contamination issues, with cups bought both on and off campus needing properly disposed of as well as biodegradable/ recyclable ones



Engagement and Promotions

- Getting students to understand and participate in your initiative is vital
- Engaging with students around the promotions can encourage ownership, in a similar way to what was discussed within the Student Engagement Events Sharing Series guide, available [here](#)
- A good example of student involvement in creating research is shared in Swansea University's Swell teams video, [available here](#)
- Annual engagement is necessary due to the turnover of students in the community, as well as encouraging participation by staff to maintain the norm over longer periods



- Waste signage must be clear to lower contamination issues (especially if using biodegradables), specifically around the separation of lids/sleeves from normal cups. Signage must be updated regularly to maintain effectiveness, as otherwise it will no longer be noticed by the audience
- Education on waste generally would improve recycling and reuse rates dramatically, if you can find a space / time / platform for this